

Seniors at HUD Subsidized Apartment Complex Mourn the **"Death of their Civil Rights"**

Tenants will gather at 1060 Broad Street and proceed to the steps of City Hall in a mock funeral procession.

Newark-- On Wednesday, April 17, 2002 at 11:30 AM, more than 50 Seniors from the Essex Plaza I Apartment complex will gather in a mock funeral procession from 1060 Broad to City Hall where they will lay to rest a cardboard coffin, symbolically burying their constitutional rights. The demonstration is in protest of the oppressive conditions that residents have endured at the hands of Mr. Kenneth Pagano, the owner and management agent of Essex Plaza I. The residents will be joined by neighboring tenants from Essex Plaza II, also owned and managed by Mr. Pagano, and a host of Newark activists involved in tenant and civil rights.

"We are living in a autocratic dictatorship right here in Newark", said Mr. Stephan Boto, the tenant president of the Essex Plaza I Tenants Association. "We've been stripped of our rights as tenants, and worse, we have been stripped of our rights as human beings." According to Mr. Boto, Pagano has gone to great lengths to suppress the tenants from forming a legitimate and independent tenant association, a guaranteed right under the Federal Regulations that govern HUD subsidized housing. Tactics have including locking the Tenant Association out of the community room, issuing written notices barring residents from having guests and elected officials visit the property, and using a social organization controlled by management to compete with the legitimate tenant association.

In March, tenants invited several City Council candidates to hold a forum at 1060 Broad. Pagano physically blocked the candidates from entering the building and brought in several Newark policemen to enforce the ban. Residents have gone to great lengths to win back their basic rights, including making regular phone calls and sending countless letters to Mayor Sharpe James and the local HUD office. Mr. Boto recently testified about the conditions at Essex Plaza before a public city council meeting. Surprisingly, neither HUD nor the City Administration has taken active steps to rectify the situation.

Or not so surprisingly.... According to the New Jersey Affordable Housing Management Association web site, the president of the trade association is a Mr. Kenneth Pagano. Other current members include local HUD officials, staff from the New Jersey Housing Mortgage Finance Agency (the agency that administers the Section 8 contract at Essex Plaza I and II), and several prominent developers who do regular business with City of Newark. "It is not a smoking gun exactly, but it sure does make you wonder why these horrific civil rights violations are being ignored", said Frank Hutchins, President of the Greater Newark HUD Tenant Coalition. Mr. Hutchins also noted that the conditions at both buildings are substandard, yet Mr. Pagano has received glowing inspection reports from City Code Enforcement and the Housing Mortgage Finance Agency.

The mock funeral will be the first in a series of aggressive tactics that the tenants will use to win back their basic freedoms. They are actively seeking legal representation, including reaching out to the New Jersey chapter of the ACLU as well as several prominent private law firms. Mr. Boto is optimistic that if the tenants remain united they will win this battle. "We will do whatever is needed to put an end to this tyranny. We will sue HUD and our landlord, we will elect a new Mayor and councilman and we will be protest, whatever it takes. But I promise that this travesty of justice will not continue."